

Physical Activity and the Health of Young People

Centers for Disease Control and Prevention/Division of Adolescent and School Health

Benefits of Regular Physical Activity

- Helps build and maintain healthy bones and muscles¹
- Helps control weight, build lean muscle, and reduce fat¹
- Reduces feelings of depression and anxiety and promotes psychological well-being¹

Long-Term Consequences of Physical Inactivity

- Physical inactivity and poor diet together account for at least 300,000 deaths in the United States each year. Only tobacco use contributes to more preventable deaths.²
- Physical inactivity increases the risk of dying prematurely, dying of heart disease, and developing diabetes, colon cancer, and high blood pressure.¹

Overweight Among Youth

- In 1999–2000, 15% of children and adolescents (ages 6–19) were overweight—triple what the proportion was in 1980.³
- Children and adolescents who are overweight are more likely to be overweight or obese as adults; ^{4,5,6} overweight adults are at increased risk for heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, diabetes, some types of cancer, and gallbladder disease.⁷

Participation in Physical Activity by Young People

- During the 7 days preceding the survey, 77% of children aged 9–13 reported participating in free-time physical activity, and 39% reported participating in organized physical activity.⁸
- Sixty-five percent of high school students participate in sufficient vigorous physical activity^a, and 26% participate in sufficient moderate physical activity.^{b,8}
- Participation in physical activity declines as children get older.
- Regular participation in sufficient vigorous physical activity has been reported by 69% of young people aged 12–13 years but only 38% of those aged 18–21.⁹
- Seventy-two percent of 9th graders but only 56% of 12th graders participate in sufficient vigorous physical activity on a regular basis.¹⁰

Percentage of High School Students Participating in Different Types of Physical Activity, by Sex, 2001¹⁰

Type of Activity	Girls	Boys
Sufficient vigorous physical activity ^a	57%	73%
Sufficient moderate physical activity ^b	23%	28%
Sufficient strengthening exercises ^c	45%	63%
Played on a sports team ^d	50%	61%

^a Activities that caused sweating and hard breathing, that were performed for 20 minutes or more on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey.

^b Activities that did not cause sweating or hard breathing, that were performed for 30 minutes or more on at least 5 of the 7 days preceding the survey.

^c For example, push-ups, sit-ups, or weightlifting on at least 3 of the 7 days preceding the survey.

^d During the 12 months preceding the survey.



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Participation in Physical Education Classes

- Fifty-two percent of U.S. high school students (74% of 9th graders but only 31% of 12th graders) were enrolled in a physical education class in 2001.¹⁰
- The percentage of students who attended a daily physical education class dropped from 42% in 1991 to 32% in 2001. In 2001, 49% of 9th graders but only 20% of 12th graders attended a daily physical education class.¹⁰
- Of students enrolled in physical education classes in 2001, 17% reported that they did not exercise for 20 or more minutes in an average physical education class.¹⁰

References

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For Additional Information Contact:

CDC, Division of Adolescent and School Health
 4770 Buford Highway, NE
 Mail Stop K-12
 Atlanta, Georgia 30341-3717
 888-231-6405
 E-mail: HealthyYouth@cdc.gov